



SECTION 5

Work/Life Balance Options

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Work/Life Balance Options

Background

Progressive organizations often consolidate certain employee benefits and flexible workplace policies into an integrated “Work/Life” program. As part of the HR 2005 concept design effort, the Department of Personnel convened a team to look into how work/life balance issues should be incorporated into the state’s new human resource system.

The Work/Life Balance Concept Design Team was composed of nine members representing state agencies, higher education, and labor. The team members are listed at the end of this section. The team met from February through early March 2003 to evaluate existing leave and benefit (excluding insurance and retirement benefits) policies and programs, and to identify and make recommendations for possible modifications. Specifically, the team addressed the following topics:

- Work/Life programs or integrated packages
- Leave policies and practices
- Telework (telecommuting) policies and practices
- Work schedule designations

Washington State government offers much in this aspect of human resource management already. The majority of the needs for change are in the simplification of rules, consolidation of higher education and general government rules, consolidation of information, and development of additional tools and resources.

Work/Life Programs and Recommendations

Work/Life balance is about the interconnection between the employee’s job and his/her life away from work. It acknowledges the broad range of personal issues that can affect the workplace, and the many ways in which work and the work environment can influence an employee’s personal life. Work/Life strategies are initiatives that support the employee’s ability to balance the many demands they face in daily life.

Many employers, especially those vested in tracking their investment in their workforce, are finding that the implementation of an integrated Work/Life program pays off with regard to the business bottom line. Work/Life programs have been shown to:

- Reduce costs related to hiring, training and development, and health insurance
- Increase productivity, by reducing absenteeism and stress
- Strengthen employee commitment by providing workplace flexibility and choices

- Help attract and retain talent
- Create access to a broader range of talent (for example, offering flexible schedules and telecommuting create access to talented individuals who might otherwise not be able to work, or who would not ordinarily be available for undesirable locations)

The well-designed Work/Life program benefits all employees within the organization. All employees at some time in their life will experience a situation or life change that will either affect, or be affected by their work. Implementation of a flexible schedule may allow employees time to volunteer at a school, reduce day care or elder care costs, or continue their education. Employee assistance services offer employees support, guidance, or resources to assist through a personal crisis. A shared leave program allows an employee to maintain benefits and wages during a time of a family or personal medical crisis.

Work/Life Programs in Other Public Jurisdictions

Examples of public sector Work/Life programs are described below:

University of Washington

The University of Washington (UW) offers a comprehensive Work/Life Program for faculty, staff, and students. It has a comprehensive informational brochure providing a list of resources and programs available through their Work/Life Program.

Examples of some of the services include:

- A Work/Life Resource Center that provides leave policy information, and publications, videos, books, and other resources on a variety of topics, including parenting, childcare, aging, eldercare, and balancing work/family/life responsibilities.
- A Sick ChildCare Program that provides a working parent with an ill child an alternative to staying home to provide care. Through Virginia Mason Medical Center, the parent can elect to use their Sick ChildCare Program to care for a mildly ill child, allowing the parent to work. (The City of Seattle and King County have also made this program available for their employees.)
- A Caregiver Directory assists in locating caregivers for childcare or eldercare.
- Lactation stations are located throughout the campus for both working and student mothers.

The UW's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is an integral part of their work/life program. It provides assistance for a wide variety of life issues including stress, parenting, grief, aging, abuse, alcohol/drugs, marriage, legal or family issues. As they acknowledge the effect of financial or legal problems on daily stress and anxiety, professional help is also available to help address credit, bankruptcy, divorce, civil/criminal disputes, or a wide variety of other issues.

The UW has also developed policies and guidelines for telework and alternative or flexible work schedules, posting them on their website for employee accessibility.

State of Colorado

In Colorado, an executive order and joint house resolution establishes accountability for leadership through a requirement to include work/life information to new employees and to evaluate supervisors on their use of work/life programs and practices. Colorado offers alternate work arrangement programs, employee discounts, and resource and referral information as part of a work/life balance strategy for its employees. The Colorado employee discount program is available to all state employees. Various businesses, including those providing child care, computers, cellular phone service, health clubs, pre-paid legal services, insurance, and mortgage loans offer a discount to state workers.

University of Arizona

The University of Arizona (UA) was recognized as one of the “20 Cutting Edge Work/Life Programs” by the National Institute of Business Management for having one of the most integrated “whole person” models in their UA Life & Work Connections program. Their program focuses on working with employees from the time they begin employment through retirement. They offer a “family” of services, including:

- Employee Assistance Counseling/Consultation provides individual counseling and departmental consultation services on a variety of personal and workplace issues.
- Worksite Wellness offers educational presentations and activities, such as flu prevention and wellness screenings for employees.
- Childcare and Family Resources offers a broad spectrum of information, referral, and educational services with current or anticipated child care and parenting issues.
- Elder Care and Life Cycle Resources provides information referral and educational services for employees who have or anticipate eldercare and family caregiving issues.
- Work/Life Support offers resources and support to employees and departments on current issues and emerging trends in the work/life field.

The UA also has a central Work/Life Center and informational resource group. Its website is very well designed, outlining the program, resources, and providing valuable information to employees.

Federal Office of Personnel Management

The United States Office of Personnel Management contains an Office of Work/Life Programs which develops policy and offers guidance and technical assistance to the various federal agencies administering work/life and wellness programs.

Federal Department of Health and Human Services

The Quality of Work Life Initiative is a program designed to enhance the agency’s service to the public by improving employee satisfaction, strengthening the workplace

learning, and helping employees better manage change and transition. An annual employee survey helps to identify workplace issues that need to be addressed. Since the introduction of the survey, new practices have been implemented. They include conferences on family friendly work practices and diversity, creation of a central Work/Life Center, avoidance of involuntary separations, pilot projects to redesign work to improve productivity and work/life balance, and the creation of an internal change agent network to help manage change and transition. The program is department-wide, however, flexibility is granted to the divisions to offer flexible work arrangements that best suit their particular mission and culture.

Work/Life Program Recommendations for Washington State

Washington State government presently has many of the features and programs contained in the best work/life balance programs, such as an Employee Advisory Service, flexible schedules, Shared Leave Program, dependent assistance programs, telework, and leave for family care. These programs are working well, providing needed assistance and support to our employees.

While Washington State does have a number of programs available to support the needs of our employees, we are lacking in any central coordination or marketing of those programs. Our employees do not have a designated central resource to provide comprehensive information on the available policies and services.

Within agencies, the human resources office has this information, but this resource is not always readily available to employees in locations that are removed from these offices. The Department of Personnel also has this information and offers assistance through various sources. However, there isn't one central source, or a consistent effort to package information for Work/Life balance issues.

Recommendation:

An integrated Work/Life program should be incorporated in the state's new human resource system. This includes the establishment of a dedicated information resource to provide assistance to agencies wanting to establish agency-specific resource programs, and possibly an overall statewide program for those employees in agencies/institutions without an internal program.

Consideration should also be given to the development of a website dedicated to promoting the services Washington currently has available. Agencies could link the information from their intra-agency website and allow easy access for their employees. Creation of a website is an important component to a successful marketing strategy. Implementing such an approach would not necessarily require additional staff resources, but rather a consolidation of knowledge and programs.

Holidays and Leave - Options and Recommendations

The Work/Life Balance Concept Design Team looked at the existing laws and rules governing the Washington State personnel system to compare and contrast policies with those of other public entities. In terms of paid leave, Washington State is in the low middle range for leave and paid holidays.

The following outlines the present policies and shows the team's recommendations. The Department of Personnel is not advancing these recommendations at this time, due to the need to address higher priority issues outlined in previous sections of this document. The recommendations will be considered at a later date.

Vacation Leave

Vacation leave accrual ranges from 12 to 22 days per year, depending upon the employee's length of service. The other states range from 13 to 30 days per year. Higher education and general government accrual rates vary at some years of service points, although the minimum and maximum accruals are the same.

Recommendation:

- *Increase to the minimum-maximum accrual rate.*
- *Simplify and consolidate accrual rules. Provide for consistency in the accrual rate for all state employees, using the higher education rate.*

Sick Leave

The rate of sick leave accrual is eight hours per month. This is about average in comparison to other jurisdictions, although some offer 15 days per year. While some usage differences exist between higher education and general government, the basic concepts are consistent, allowing for personal illness or preventative care, family care, and some types of parental leave.

Recommendation:

- *Simplify and consolidate rules.*
- *Add the ability to use sick leave to care for a sibling.*

Parental Leave

Leave for parenting purposes is presently incorporated into sick leave.

Recommendation:

Consolidate/simplify all childcare and parental leave rules into one leave section.

Bereavement Leave

Currently, bereavement leave is available in this state to the employees of higher education institutions. General government employees must use sick leave or annual leave for bereavement. Most other states offer bereavement leave ranging from 3-5 days per covered occurrence.

Recommendation:

Create bereavement leave for all state employees, using the language in the present higher education rules.

Paid Holidays

Washington State allows 10 paid holidays. Other states range from 9-17 paid holidays per year. No change is recommended, as these are legal holidays set forth in statute.

Personal Holidays

One personal holiday per calendar year. Other states range from 1-6 paid personal days per year. No change is recommended, as this provision is set forth in statute.

Recognition Leave

Presently, Washington State general service does not have provisions allowing additional paid leave as a reward for exemplary performance. It is becoming a common practice in other jurisdictions to grant additional paid leave in conjunction with performance evaluations as a reward. Awarding additional leave is viewed as an important performance incentive, especially in times when a pay raise, or other remuneration, is not possible. The University of Washington offers discretionary leave, up to six days per calendar year, as a reward for noteworthy achievements and/or work effort for professional staff. Discretionary leave must be used prior to use of vacation leave, must be taken before December 31st, and is not subject to cash out.

Recommendation:

A rule should be added to allow additional leave to be granted in recognition of outstanding performance, achievement, productivity, or other exceptional situations which merit recognition. Recognition is also discussed in Section 3, Performance Management, of this document.

Civic Duty (Jury Duty)

Existing rules are inconsistent. Higher education rules require employees to reimburse the institution for all civic duty compensation received, exclusive of expenses incurred. General government rules allow employees to retain such compensation.

Recommendation:

All state and higher education employees be allowed to retain compensation for performance of civic duty (e.g., payment for serving on jury duty).

Miscellaneous Leave

General government has civil leave as part of miscellaneous leave; higher education has a separate leave category for civil leave (civic duty).

Recommendations:

Revise rules to resolve inconsistencies between general government and higher education with regard to civil leave.

Add language for organ donation and other life giving procedures to reflect Executive Order 02-01.

Add language for volunteer leave.

Other

No changes are recommended for the following, as they are prescriptive in statute and/or covered under federal mandates: military leave; FMLA; shared leave; sick leave cash out; and, vacation leave cash out.

Telework Recommendations

The team did not feel that the issue of telecommuting should be addressed in rule. Agencies and institutions should continue to create their own internal policies and procedures governing employee use of telework options.

Executive Order 01-03 concerning commute trip reduction, directs the state to take a leadership role as an employer in adopting programs to reduce commute trips by implementing programs to allow for flextime and telework options for employees. Each agency is responsible to adopt written policies and define criteria and procedures for flextime and telework options for their employees.

The Interagency Task Force for Commute Trip Reduction, created under Executive Order 01-03, developed Telework Policy Guidelines and Flexible Work Hours Policy Guidelines for state agencies. The Guidelines (available through the Department of General Administration) provide clarification, outline agency and employee responsibilities, and give process guidelines for agencies/institutions.

Recommendation:

Continue existing policy of agency discretion and flexibility in telework issues.

Work Schedule Recommendations

Note: Section 1, Classification and Compensation, addresses scheduling issues affecting compensation, including work period designation, in the discussion of overtime pay.

RCW 41.040.390 provides for use of flexible work schedules and finds that flextime should be used by agencies to the maximum extent possible. The law does not require agencies to consider flextime time if it would impede service to the public, affect the hours an office is open to the public, or affect the agency's ability to accomplish its mission in any way.

Current WACs for both systems allow considerable flexibility for alternate schedules, compressed workweeks, and part-time schedules. The new rules should ensure maximum flexibility.

Recommendations:

- *Retain 40-hour workweek.*
- *Simplify and consolidate rules governing flexible and alternate work schedules, simplify and consolidate schedule change notification requirements, retain part-time scheduling options, retain job-sharing options.*

Other Employee Support and Benefit Issues

Employees of other public and private entities have taken advantage of group buying power, and discounts have been made available for employees for a variety of services, entertainment, and consumer goods. Some programs also offer assistance with financial, legal, and/or mortgage assistance. The type of assistance varies from referral services to short-term consultations with a professional in the given field. Consideration should be given to adding other components to the state's current program, provided they are low cost or no cost options, and consistent with the ethics laws of the state.

Work/Life Balance Concept Team

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SECTION 6

Appeals

Appeals

A separate concept design team was not convened to deal with the subject of appeals. Rather, each team (classification and compensation, recruitment and selection, etc.) discussed the need for due process and appeal requirements as part of their conceptual review. Because this is such an important issue, the Department of Personnel has since convened a special team to develop the rules and processes for appeals of personnel actions.

In summary, the civil service reform legislation provides for the following appeal rights:

- Employees who are not in a bargaining unit have appeal rights to the Washington Personnel Resources Board for the following:
 - Dismissal
 - Suspension
 - Demotion
 - Rule violations
 - Reduction in salary
- Employees in bargaining units will have provisions negotiated as part of their bargaining agreement
- All employees will have appeal rights to the Washington Personnel Resources Board for position exemption, allocation, and reallocation

Detailed recommendations for rules and processes concerning appeals are currently under development and will be available for review and input later in 2003.